

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

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Matthew R Ude

Luke 4:31-44 ³¹ Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. ³² And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. ³³ Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴ saying, "Let *us* alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!" ³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in *their* midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. ³⁶ Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this *is*! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." ³⁷ And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region. ³⁸ Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. ³⁹ So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them. ⁴⁰ When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. ⁴¹ And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking *them*, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ. ⁴² Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; ⁴³ but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." ⁴⁴ And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.

Our epistle reading for today is one that I'm sure you are all very familiar with. It is one that is especially used and associated with weddings. Everyone wants 1 Corinthians 13 in their wedding. And that is ok, it is an appropriate one for a wedding. If the bride and the groom especially but also all the rest of the people actually listen to what Paul is saying. Too often people hear 1 Corinthians 13 and their head is filled with these romantic notions of hearts and balloons and a utopia of perfect happiness floating on clouds of champagne.

Let me put it another way. John and Kelly come into my office. They say they want to get married. They are in love and they want to spend their life together. They say they want 1 Corinthians 13 as their wedding text because it is such a beautiful expression of what their love for each other is. Ok that is fine I say, but then we start talking about other aspects of the wedding. Very soon there are arguments and bickering. John wants this Kelly wants that. Or they both want something and I tell them no I'm sorry but you can't do that in the church. John's parents want one thing. Kelly's parents another. Within minutes we have completely forgotten everything that 1 Corinthians 13 says.

And then often comes the biggest lie of all, "It's my day." It's not your day. It's not the bride's day. It's not the groom's day. It is not even their day together. That attitude is not the love that 1 Corinthians 13 is portraying. Or did I miss the part where Paul says, "Love makes sure that I get what I want on my wedding day."

If you want to spend the rest of your life showing 1 Corinthians 13 like love towards one another then start on the first day of that life by showing the love towards the other. Grooms serve your bride with your wedding day choices. Brides serve your groom with your wedding day choices. Bride and groom together serve your parents and guests with your wedding day choices. Parents of the bride and groom serve your children with your wedding day choice etc.

If you want to know what 1 Corinthians 13 love looks like forget about the selfish and sinful human weddings and marriages and instead look here at our text, see Christ as he brings "God's Great Grace To A People In Great Need." See Christ as he show us what 1 Corinthians 13 love is really like.

Jesus begins the day by preaching in the synagogue. This is no simple task. I can attest that preaching even 20 minutes is exhausting. One pastor said that two hours on Sunday morning preaching and doing bible class is easily equivalent to 12 hours of work. It is exhausting. Obviously there isn't much physical labor involved but something about it drains you of all energy, perhaps the mental stress. In any case Sunday afternoon I have no desire to do anything other than sit on my couch with a beer and a football game. Jesus of course didn't preach for just 20 minutes but most of the morning. And he did it gladly because the need of the people was so great.

But then He had this demon to deal with. And there again was a man in great need being posed by a demon. And no doubt Jesus was tired from teaching all morning but here was a man in need and Jesus reached out in love to help him and drive out the demons.

Then he went to Simon's house, and perhaps he went specifically to rest and relax after a day of teaching and casting out demons. But instead there was more in need, and Jesus does not turn his back but heals Simon's mother-in-law, showing 1 Corinthians 13 like love.

By this time the day has worn on the sun is beginning to set and still Jesus gets no rest because many more in great need begin to come to him. And each individually he laid his hands on them and healed them. Individually one by one He helped them. I can give you some idea what this is like. When I would preach in India after the service the crowds would gather each one asking for me to pray for them. And sometimes these were large crowds and we would be there for hours praying for each individual person. But these were people in need and Jesus did not turn his back on them but gave to each what grace and gifts of God they were in need of.

Finally the night too was coming to an end and Jesus in desperate need not of sleep but of time with his father, in desperate need of prayer and meditation left the village to find a place to be alone and pray.

But still the crowds followed him. In their great need they still sought him. Now finally Jesus does stop them, but not so that he can get rest but because there are others in need.

This is the reason he has come he tells them and therefore he must continue on to the next village, so that he can bring "God's great grace to more people in great need."

This is 1 Corinthians 13 like love, and like I said I'll happily preach on 1 Corinthians 13 for your wedding. But I will also then expect to see you reflect this same type of love towards one another in your wedding planning and preparation.

This is the ministry of Jesus one of service to those in need.

It begins always with the thing they need the most the proclamation of the Gospel. He is happy to help out with their other needs, their earthly needs, but he knows that first and foremost the thing they need is the word of God.

As a missionary I saw this again and again. Other missionaries, other churches came and built houses, and built schools, and gave food but did not teach people about the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. It is easy to slip into that type of thinking. To build a house for someone, or build them a school and think that this is what they truly need. This is good but it is not what they truly need. The need of all men is this that they see their sin, and hear about Jesus who died for that sin.

"I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent."

God looked down from heaven and he saw all the huddled mass of humanity. He saw their sorrow and pain and suffering. He saw their great need and he said to his Son, go and tell them about my love and forgiveness and die for their sins. That is what they need.

I saw it as a missionary. I see it now as a pastor as well. So many people who do not see or understand any real need to come regularly to church, to pray and study at home, to send their kids to Sunday school and come to bible class.

Jesus thought the need of the people was so great in this respect that he missed sleep and rest so that he could go and preach to other villages. He went day after day from one village to another, all so that he could preach the word of God to them.

Jesus' miracles also served this greater need. It is true that he had compassion on them in their ills and suffering. He saw their earthly needs and reached out to help, but only so long as it served their greater need. Notice how Luke emphasis the power of his Word. The people saw the power of that word as it

healed those who were sick and they knew that if his word had the authority to heal earthly sickness that it also had the authority to heal the heavenly sickness that is to give the forgiveness of sins.

When the people press him to stay, he knows that he must move on, the preaching of the Gospel comes first.

Even the casting out of the demons serves the greater need of the people for the forgiveness of sins.

Why is it that Jesus will not allow the demons to speak about whom He is? It is partly because the time to reveal himself has not yet come.

Remember what we talked about last week? God has hidden his power and glory in things that seem mundane and simple to us. God hid himself in the person of Jesus Christ for a reason. He wants us to learn of him first through his love and word. Consider the story of Elijah and the still small voice. He does not want the demons to "give the game away" so to speak.

I have a friend Mark. I've known him since I was about 8. In college he studied journalism at UW EC and was soon working at WEAU in Eau Claire as an anchor. When I was pastor in Millston a couple getting married asked if I knew someone who could sing a solo for them. I asked Mark if he would be willing. After the wedding everyone was whispering "isn't that the anchor from WEAU." I thought that was pretty funny. Its just Mark. What is the big deal? Having gotten to know him first as a friend it was hard to see him as anything else.

God hid himself in the form of a man, so that we could get to know him as our loving savior before coming face to face with his glory and judgment. God came in the person of Jesus so that he could preach and teach as a man to men. So that they could get to know him without the great fear that would accompany his full glory, so that they could learn of his love and compassion. the demons sought to expose his full glory and undo God's plan. They could not be allowed to speak.

Because of our need He brings the great grace of God to us, in water, in bread and wine, in the stories of the scripture, in the word.

This is what we need! More than food and clothing, more than air itself. We need the great grace of God which is offered to us in His word. Do not neglect it or despise it or ignore it just because it looks like something ordinary and boring. This is the grace of God given for the great need of all men.